



Paying Tribute To LI's Veterans

This story was reported by Bart Jones, Sid Cassese and Collin Nash and was written by Arnold Abrams.

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World War II was raging, and Eleanor Collins Faust wanted to serve her country. But it wasn't easy. First she was rejected by the Navy, then by the Army.



She finally was accepted by an innovative program called WASP, or Women Airforce Service Pilots. She was among about 1,100 volunteers who became the first women in U.S. history to fly military aircraft during the program's two-year existence.

"It was the most wonderful experience in my life," Faust, 81, of Orient, said yesterday during Veterans Day ceremonies at Long Island National Cemetery, Pinelawn, which honored her and another WASP colleague, Margaret Werber Gilman, 80, of Garden City.

Despite the good memories, the WASP women, who were never officially part of the military, often were treated shabbily, Gilman recalled. When the program ended abruptly in December 1944, for example, they had to pay their own way home.

About 38 WASP volunteers were killed while flying domestic missions, yet the government did not pay for their funerals or even to ship their remains home, said WASP historian Julia Lauria-Blum of the American Airpower Museum at Republic Airport in Farmingdale.

During the Pinelawn ceremony, attended by approximately 100, Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington) announced he was introducing a bill to honor the WASPs who died on duty.

"It was a demanding, even dangerous job," Israel said. "And they did it at a time when society refused to acknowledge that women were equal partners."

The program was created in 1942 to compensate for a shortage of pilots. Doing very nontraditional work for women, WASPs flew support missions within the United States, ferrying supplies or towing practice targets for gunners on the ground.

At Veterans Day ceremonies in Freeport, memories mingled yesterday with strong themes of patriotism, sacrifice and duty against a backdrop of song by the local high school chorus.

The keynote speaker, Army Brig. Gen. Harry J. Mott III, spoke of America's greatness and the animosity faced by U.S. forces around the globe.

"We've done more and given more to the world than all of the other industrial countries combined," Mott, a Hempstead resident, told an audience of approximately 200. "So why do they all hate us? Because we're free and successful."

Nevertheless, the retired officer added, the United States must continue to back democracy. "Each generation of Americans must step forward and do its patriotic duty," he asserted, "and we must not pull out of Iraq as we did in Lebanon and Somalia."

Another speaker was Freeport Mayor Bill Glacken, who has a 27-year-old son training to become an Army corpsman and a 21-year-old scheduled to join the Navy Dec. 4. "This is the generation that is going to protect our freedoms, as earlier generations did their duty," he said. "Today we pay tribute to them all."

Riverhead resident Mary Langhorn wasn't about to let dreary weather dampen her resolve to honor her son, Pfc. Garfield Langhorn Jr., a radio operator who sacrificed his life in January 1969 to save his Army comrades in Vietnam.

"I was thinking he endured way more than anything this cold, damp weather could do to me," said Langhorn, whose son, who had just turned 20 when he died, was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.

More than a thousand people attending yesterday's Veterans Day ceremonies at Calverton National Cemetery stood in solemn silence, most bearing umbrellas, during the proceedings.

On cue, as the last of more than a dozen veterans ended their salute, the distinctive sound of four U.S. Army support choppers pierced the stillness in a fly-over finale to the ceremony.

William Burton, a Vietnam veteran, looked up, making a connection between what he saw and heard and his memories of choppers that hauled up nets filled with casualties during one particularly bloody battle with enemy troops. He was only 18 then, said Burton, now 56 and the father of three grown children.

A retired New York City transit employee from Far Rockaway, Burton was visiting the military cemetery for the first time, paying homage to his brother, his father and a close friend, all of whom are buried there.

"Looking at the soldiers brings back memories," he said. "But today, I just want to think about the good memories. It took me 10 years to put away the bad ones."

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